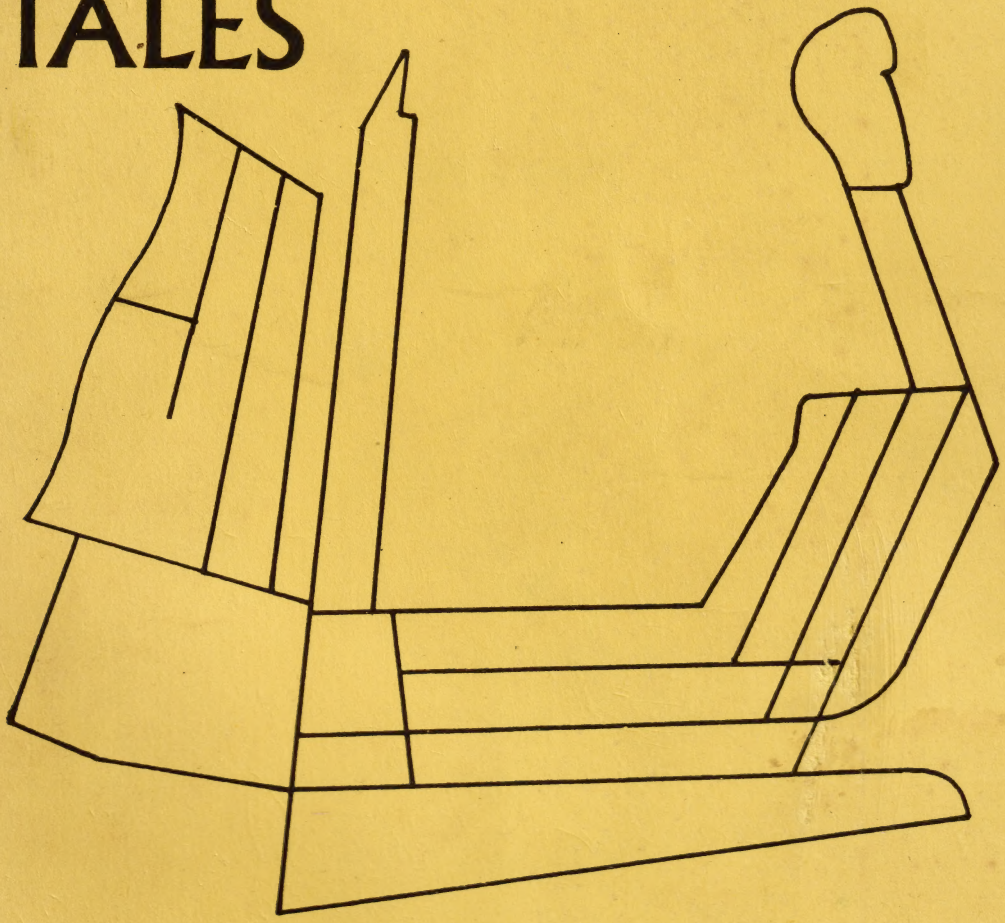
GLASTONBURY TALES



by John A. Greed

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CHAPTER 6

"GLASTONBURY FAYRE" - OR THE 1971 POP FESTIVAL

Picture green fields stretching down a hillside. Sprinkle the scene with hundreds of tents, and with camp fires here and there. Put into the picture ten thousand young people doing their thing - young men with thick flowing hair falling on their shoulders, young women in long dresses.

At the foot of the hill see a pyramid almost sixty feet high, glistening silver in the light of floodlamps. Hear a "pop" group with electric guitars, drums and other instruments upon a stage on the side of the pyramid, pouring music through amplifiers at a volume audible I should think a couple of miles away. Feel the ground literally tremble with the heavy beat of the music.

On the ground in front of the stage several dozen young people - some naked - dance fast and furious with their hands stretched up towards the pyramid, oblivious of all around. A youth wearing nothing but a headband stands meditating with a fixed stare, unaware of the world.

Another youth wearing fawn shirt and trousers and a headband which makes him look rather like an aristocratic Red Indian emerges from a little tent nearby, records the scene with an expensive camera, and disappears back into his tent.

Noise, DIN, SOUND, THUNDEROUS SOUND from the amplifiers, and the dancers continue to gyrate.

A few local people who have dared to come near this multitude of brightly-coloured creatures from another world stand watching as though they have never seen or heard anything like it before - as I'm sure they haven't! The district wonders what on earth has hit it. People write to the papers, and the local Member of Parliament sees the Secretary of State for the Environment.

This is the midsummer 1971 pop festival held at Worthy Farm near the village of Pilton, six miles from Glastonbury, under the name of "Glastonbury Fayre".

Let us walk around and see what there is to see. There is mud, but not much, for the weather is hot and sunny. There are young people - everywhere - mostly sitting on the ground in groups, and if we join one of these groups, we shall find that they are generally friendly and willing to talk. There is litter, but not much, for there has been a session in which ten thousand people picked up all the litter they could see for five minutes.

There is a grey 1950s style Rolls Royce with a dent in one wing. There is a man with no clothes on riding a motor-cycle. Both the motor-bike and the Rolls must have special permits as no unauthorised motor vehicles are allowed in the field. A couple of the Hell's Angels are there, without their motor-bikes.

Beyond the hedge is a cornfield and it is noticeable that the multitude has generally kept out of this field and has not damaged the corn.

There is a character by the pyramid in a feathered black hat and long black cloak, with a white hen perched clucking on his shoulder. He is said to be a *guru* - a teacher of something or other - but I haven't fathomed out what his message is. One little man with a clearer message leaps up in the midst of the crowd during a brief lull in the music and preaches free forgiveness of sins through faith in Jesus at the top of his voice for a couple of minutes, but most of those within earshot just laugh. Then deafening music fills the air once more as a new pop group booms into action.

A young man pushes his way roughly to the foot of the pyramid. He is tall, black-haired and of wild appearance. He dances in a frenzy - surely the human frame cannot stand much of this. He falls to the ground - and at that moment the music stops, whether by design or coincidence I do not know. The young man is carried away to recover. The torrent of music re-starts.

Glastonbury Tor is visible in the distance and I am glad to see it: it reminds me of the peaceful West Country which seems so far removed from the present goings-on.

Across the field there is a second stage near which an older man (a sort of middle-aged hippy) prances about in what looks like a pair of pyjama trousers.

Not far from this second stage are a couple of big white screens onto which ever-changing patterns (like a giant kaleidoscope) are shone at night. Free lentil soup - enough for everybody to have some - is available nearby. (I never found out who financed this: ten thousand bowls of soup don't just appear from nowhere.)

On the far side of the field are the latrines: trenches dug by an excavator and divided into cubicles with lengths of sacking. They strike me as being primitive but just about adequate. I have not noticed any facilities for washing, but there is a queue for water outside the farmhouse on the hill. Water is a rather precious commodity and there are notices up asking everyone not to waste it.

Behind the farmhouse is a bad-trip dome (a dome-shaped temporary building to which anyone suffering bad effects from drugs can be taken to recover) - close to this I see a Jesus tent whose doctrines I have not discovered but I feel somehow that its message is not entirely the same as the gospel of free forgiveness which the little man in the midst of the crowd shouted out.

And reverberating over all is the almost-continuous sound of *that music*.

So the crowd accepts free lentil soup but laughs at the little man's offer of free forgiveness. That's odd, for the little preacher-man is not out of place here: this is supposed to be a spiritual - religious - festival. It is a conscious attempt, timed for the midsummer solstice, to produce some sort of fertility rite. The pyramid is deliberately sited on the Glastonbury-Stonehenge ley line,

and in shape and basic dimensions it is a scale model (1/10 actual size) of the Great Pyramid of Egypt. The whole festival is intended to be a gigantic spiritual event.

Mind you, not all the gathered throng sees it that way. Some of those present have never even *heard* of the spiritual facet of the gathering, and are here just for the music - or for other things: I see that one boy has replaced his trousers with a rather small towel and it is quite obvious what *he* has come for. Some, apparently devoid of any sort of spiritual consciousness, look in disbelief on being told that the festival has a religious side; as did one fellow who, when I asked him about it, enquired in amazement, "Are you stoned?" - which being translated means that he asked me whether I were under the influence of drugs.

A little team of Christians is handing out evangelical literature and seems to be having about the same degree of success as the young magazine-vendor who is asking all and sundry, "Would you like to buy an obscene magazine?" - Some monks are there on a day's "outing" sitting in their robes and holding discussions with the young folk. A negro clergyman is around somewhere. But the scene as a whole is a pagan festival.

These ten thousand are not typical of the young people who have "discovered" Glastonbury as their "spiritual home". Glastonbury does attract numbers of long-haired visitors in summer, and *some* of them are idle layabouts, but those with no insight into the spiritual nature of the place do not survive the Glastonbury winter and the discouragements to their presence which make their way of life less easy than it might be - e.g. the "NO HIPPIES" signs which are to be seen in nearly all the Glastonbury cafés and restaurants.

There are some folk who seek the meaning of life and believe they can find it in Glastonbury, who live throughout the year in the Glastonbury area, often in somewhat rough conditions and despite local opposition. (I am told that one "seeker" furnished a vacant pig-sty and lived in it for five months until he was eventually evicted. On the other hand some of them live in civilised homes and

have regular jobs.) These see Glastonbury as their holy place. Some expect Christ to return on Glastonbury Tor. But the majority of those at the festival were not of this breed.

The inescapable music stops for a minute for some announcements to be given over the amplifiers. "Lonely acid-dealer seeks lively chick for the night: apply back of pyramid", says one. To me that epitomises the mood of a large section of the gathering. *(Translation-note:- "acid-dealer" was the current "in" term for a drug-pusher.)*

After midnight, three crosses about ten feet tall are erected in front of the pyramid. The parallel with Christ's crucifixion is disturbingly evident. The crowd is told to move back, but keeps pressing forward until it is warned that the middle cross is going to explode. The three crosses are set on fire, and their rising flames give an aura of eeriness to the whole scene. Then the fire reaches the chemical with which the hollow middle cross is packed. A great sheet of yellowish flame roars up. It is very impressive and sounds of approval are heard on all sides. The whole happening is well-staged and memorable, but as the flames die down I have no idea what the burning of the three crosses has signified. I suspect no-one else has, either.

The music swells again. It's gone 1.0 a.m., and there's no sign of packing up for the night. I'm going home. Apparently there's a court injunction to prevent them playing amplified music at this hour, but if there is, it is ignored. Someone says they can't lock up ten thousand.

I would have thought the organisers could be in trouble for breach of an injunction, but I suppose they could say they were unable to stop the particular group from playing - and it would be very difficult to tell *which* of the pop groups was responsible unless someone came down to the pyramid to find out. Anyone doing so would certainly be outnumbered! I note there are no police in the field - which is of course private

property - though there are plenty in the approach lanes, directing traffic and being generally good-humoured and helpful. I understand there were some arrests for drug offences outside the festival.

I saw a drug-pusher at work selling drugs by the pyramid. He was an intelligent-looking fellow with beautiful blonde hair, and was dressed as a woman. It struck me that he was worse than a murderer and the human race would be better without him, but as I hesitated, not knowing what to do, he disappeared in the crowd and I never saw him again. Probably there are people in hospitals - or in cemeteries - today as a result of his activities.

This problem of drugs is a difficult one. Different sorts of drugs produce different results - sleeping pills and pep pills for instance are drugs producing opposite results. Two of the nasty ones which cause a lot of damage are LSD (a hallucinatory drug which sometimes lands its users in the mental hospital or causes them to walk over the edges of cliffs) and heroin, from the opium group, which can kill.

Not all drug-users are addicts, of course, any more than all cigarette-smokers are addicts. But they are all in danger of becoming addicts.

There are two forms of addiction: physical and psychological. Physical addiction means that the body will not perform normally without the drug; if the addict is deprived of his drug (or a medical substitute) he will be ill and may become unconscious or may die. Release from physical addiction, provided the patient does not die, only takes a few days.

Psychological addiction, quite separate from physical addiction, is the craving for the drug. This can last for years.

So long as the addict has not done himself a physical or mental injury, it is not as hard as some people imagine to bring him *physically* off drugs - though if he is coming

off heroin he will need constant attention as he is likely to be demented for several hours or days in a terrifying manner, and may suffocate through inhaling his own vomit. Within a few days the body re-adjusts and he becomes physically capable of living a normal life without the drug.

But the greater problem remains: he still has his craving for the drug, and this is likely to last a long time. Consider the position of the average addict who is released from physical dependence: he is likely to be in imperfect health and to have no job and no money. He may have no home, and is likely to have no friends except the people he has been mixing with over the last few months. So back he goes to them - and they are the very crowd in which he became addicted to drugs in the first place. Sooner or later he will end up back in hospital to be "de-toxicated" again.

At least one religious organisation has had some success in dealing with this problem. If the addict when he has been released from physical dependence can be made to see - and really to believe with all his heart - that by his throwing himself on the mercy of Jesus his past has been forgiven *and so he will go to Heaven*, he will have such a motivation to serve the Christ who has saved him and to spread the story of what God has done for him, that he will suddenly have an *ambition* to become a social worker - or a minister or a missionary - or even an honest working man - and for the love of God (and with God's help) he'll do it. He'll start a new life in a new circle of friends, and as long as his new friends look after him he is unlikely to drift back to his old haunts. After a period of several years, the cure is complete. Not all cases work out as well as this, but some do.

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The festival lasted for the greater part of a week. It did not come to any especially-startling climax, and when it was over the multitude left, some riding, some walking, some hitch-hiking; although some of them took more than twenty-four hours to get away:

they'd enjoyed themselves so much they were loath to leave.

In 1973 a film "Glastonbury Fayre" taken at the 1971 festival was shown. It had an "X" certificate.

There have been other festivals and attempts at festivals in the Glastonbury area, but this midsummer 1971 gathering is the one which, albeit arousing emotions ranging almost from ecstacy to apoplexy, is remembered - will never be forgotten by those who willingly or unwillingly were within range - is already becoming a legend.